REMARKS

Reconsideration and allowance are respectfully requested.

Claims 1-10 are pending in the application.

Claim Rejections - 35 U.S.C. 103

Claims 1-3 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over German Patent (DE3531728) in view of Nishio (6387028).

Claim 1 has been amended in order to overcome the Examiner's rejection. Such amendment does not introduce new matter, since the amendment only adds limitations that were already disclosed in the original application.

Claim 1 now requires that the second feed station supplies a single file of tubular elements **along a respective feeding direction** (figures 1, 2a and 2b of the present application). It also requires **that the feeding direction is parallel to the transportation direction** in the proximity of the wheel. Indeed, as clearly shown in figure 1, the tubular elements at the feed station (4) are transported and successively fed along only one correspondent direction. For this reason, the axis of the wheel is perpendicular to both the transportation direction and the feeding direction.

The German Patent shows that the tubular elements are fed on the wheel along a feeding direction perpendicular to the axis of the wheel.

However, the German Patent does not disclose a wheel rotatable around an axis which is **perpendicular to the transportation direction.**

Indeed, the tubular elements in single file are transported along a transportation direction and successively each tubular element is fed on the wheel along the feeding direction perpendicular to the transportation direction.

Such a deficiency is not corrected by any of the documents made of record.

In fact, Nishio shows only a feeder (33) which feeds single tubular element along a feeding direction perpendicular to the axis of the wheel (32). Please note that such document does not show a feed station supplying a single file of tubular elements. Indeed, it does not disclose that the tubular elements are transported in the proximity of the wheel **along a transportation direction parallel to the feeding direction.**

For this reason, since none of the cited references discloses or suggests a transportation direction parallel to the feeding direction, even if combining the device of the German Patent with the feeder shows by Nishio, it is impossible to obtain a transportation direction (Conveyor belt 18 of German Patent) parallel to the feeding direction.

Please also note that none of the prior art documents disclose a transportation direction parallel to a feeding direction and perpendicular to the axis of the wheel.

For these reasons, the application is believed to be non obvious over the cited art and it is respectfully requested that the rejection of claim 1 be withdrawn.

The remaining claims, depending upon claim 1, are believed to be patentable for the same reasons as claim 1, as well as for the further limitations contained therein.

Therefore, it is respectfully requested that these rejections also be withdrawn.

Conclusion

All matters having been addressed above and in view of the pending claims and remarks, Applicant respectfully requests the entry of this Amendment, the Examiner's reconsideration of the application, and the timely allowance of the pending claims.

Applicants' counsel remains ready to assist the Examiner in any way to facilitate and expedite the prosecution of this application.

Respectfully submitted,

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